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ABSTRACT

This study discusses the capabilities of preservice teachers to engage in a daily dialog with other preservice teachers as well as university supervisors, which has been shown to be an effective means to enhance the student teaching experience. In this study, students who utilized technology daily for communication with one another and with their university supervisors were compared to those who did not utilize the technology during their preservice teaching experience. In addition, the study looked at the effects that the use of technology in interacting with the preservice teacher had on the university supervisor. The paper reports on an examination of the use of electronic mail and listservs by preservice teachers and their university supervisors during a 10-week preservice teaching experience. The study was designed to: (1) evaluate the use of electronic mail and listservs by preservice teachers during their preservice teaching experience; (2) evaluate the use of electronic mail by university supervisors with their students during the preservice teaching experience; (3) evaluate the student-to-student use of electronic mail and listservs by preservice teachers during their student teaching experience; (4) develop guidelines for the feasibility of the use of electronic mail by all preservice teachers during their preservice teaching experience. (AEF)

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The Use of Telecommunications By Preservice Teachers and Their University Supervisors

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Objectives

The incorporation of technology into teacher education programs is no longer innovative; it is the norm. The development of these technologies are expanding considerably the instructional tools available to educators in a variety of educational setting. Almost taken for granted is the ability of the preservice teacher to incorporate technology into the preservice teaching experience. The renewed hope that the interaction between the preservice teacher and the university supervisor can be enhanced through the use of technology is the subject of this proposal.

This study will discuss the use of telecommunications during the preservice teacher experience to allow the preservice teacher and the university supervisor to maintain an on-going interaction. The capabilities of preservice teachers to engage in a daily dialog with other preservice teachers as well as university supervisors has been shown to be an effective means to enhance the student teaching experience. In this study, students who utilized technology daily for communication with one another and with their university supervisors were compared to those who did not utilize the technology during their preservice teaching experience. In addition, the study looked at the effects that the use of technology in interacting with the preservice teacher had on the university supervisor.

This study reports on an examination of the use of electronic mail and listservs by preservice teachers and their university supervisors during a ten week preservice teaching experience. Specifically, the study reported here was designed to:

1. Evaluate the use of electronic mail and listservs by preservice teachers during their preservice teaching experience;

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2. Evaluate the use of electronic mail by university supervisors with their students during the preservice teaching experience;

3. Evaluate the student-to-student use of electronic mail and listservs by preservice teachers during their student teaching experience;

4. Develop guidelines for the feasibility of the use of electronic mail by all preservice teachers during their preservice teaching experience.

Research Perspectives

In the present study, a decision was made to use electronic mail and listservs as a means to determine if increased communication between preservice student teachers and their university supervisors would improve and enhance the preservice student teaching experience. The use of technologies by preservice teachers during the student teaching experience is being tested by several colleges and schools of education (see, for example, Rezabek, Cochenour, & Hakes, 1996; Loiselle, Dupuy-Walker, Gingras, & Gagnon, 1996; Norton & Sprague, 1996). This study attempts to add additional information and insight for those who are evaluating the use of this type of electronic communication as a form of improving the student teaching experience. As noted by Makurat, 1995, there are many issues which must be addressed in the use of telecommunications to connect preservice teachers and classrooms. This study attempted to build upon and adapt his work for use in a university supervisor/student teacher situation.

While some work has been done on the use of telecommunication in the preservice teaching experience, much more needs to be done, both to evaluate the effectiveness of the use of telecommunication and to develop methods and measures which can be replicated for additional study.

Methodology

Participants. Participants in this study were approximately 30 undergraduate preservice teachers from an education program at a city university. The participants were involved in utilizing e-mail and listservs as an additional means of communication between the university supervisor and the preservice teacher as well as communication between preservice teachers located at other schools. Participants were randomly selected to work in either the group who worked with technology or in the group who did not communicate with their university supervisor through technology. The university supervisors who participated in this study worked both with students who utilized technology and with students who did not utilize technology. The university supervisors also kept their regular schedule of in-person meetings with both groups of interns.

Data Sources and Analysis. This study began with the problem of developing potential guidelines to address the problems which educators face in attempting to use telecommunication as an additional means to enhance the preservice teaching experience. In order to describe the procedures utilized in reaching a desired solution, the researcher maintained a record of all telecommunications between the university supervisor and the student teacher. Additionally, a record was maintained of comments and suggestions which occurred between the preservice teachers themselves. Surveys were completed by all participants at the conclusion of the study, in order to better evaluate the perceived benefits of the use of telecommunications by both those who used it during the preservice teaching process and those who did not.

Results/ Conclusion

Results of this study were disappointing. The majority of the students who participated in the group which utilized telecommunications during their preservice teaching experience had little or no prior computer experience. This led to an extremely frustrating initial first weeks of the study. This frustration was compounded by a lack of basic equipment needed to adequately maintain a telecommunication link at some of the schools involved in the study. Several schools did not have adequate Internet access, thus requiring a long distance call to keep in contact with the university. The university supervisors, who, while technologically proficient, failed to interact with the preservice teachers as requested. Although the university supervisors were supposed to contact their student teachers every day, few attempted to do so. Results showed that a majority of those students who did have access to the needed equipment at their schools did not have access to similar equipment at home, resulting in a missed opportunity for additional practice and interaction with both the university supervisor and the other preservice student teachers. Results also showed that a majority of the students involved in the study did not have access to technology in settings other than school. Results also showed, however, that of the students who had access to the technology during their preservice experience, 100% felt that this was a beneficial means of keeping in touch with their university supervisor and other student teachers, while only 65% of those who did not have technology access felt that this would be a beneficial addition to the student teaching experience.

Educational Significance

This study has shown that a combination of factors affect the use of telecommunications between preservice teachers and their university supervisors. The problems noted should be addressed by additional study. The initial results of

this and other studies show that telecommunications can be a powerful tool but that guidelines as well as suggestions for incorporation of the technology into the student teaching experience must be developed, evaluated and refined. This study, while preliminary, provides additional support for further research and suggests directions for the use of these technologies.